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Pakistan Seeks Surveillance Planes

Request to Lease U.S. Craft Cites Increasing Afghan Air Attacks

By David B. Ottaway
Washington Post Staff Writer

President Reagan received a request yesterday from Pakistan that the United States lease the nation surveillance aircraft to help it fend off an increasing number of air attacks from Afghanistan.

Sen. Gordon J. Humphrey (R-N.H.), who delivered the letter from Pakistani Prime Minister Mohammed Khan Junejo to Reagan, said the Pakistanis were renewing a request for either Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft or the smaller E2C Hawkeye to counter the attacks.

"Pakistan has asked for our help. And I believe we have an obligation to do what we can given Pakistan's crucial role in acting as a bulwark against Soviet expansionism," said Humphrey, who recently had talks in Pakistan with Junejo and President Mohammed Zia ul-Haq.

Humphrey said the Pakistanis were looking for a "short-term" way of dealing with the air attacks through the lease of AWACS or Hawkeyes, but that they also wanted to purchase a number of either aircraft to cope with the long-term threat from Soviet-backed Afghanistan.

A senior administration official

said that in the past two or three weeks the Pakistanis were showing particular interest in leasing E2C Hawkeye aircraft.

Humphrey said he had been told Pakistan was willing to give assurances it would return any leased aircraft if the United States suddenly had a need for them or if a war broke out between Pakistan and India.

The senior administration source said the Pakistani request was being studied but there were complications.

"We have to go back and think about all the laws and all the restrictions Congress has placed upon the transfer of military equipment to foreign governments," he said, emphasizing that providing the aircraft is not a "light decision."

A 1981 amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act allows leasing of U.S. military equipment only if there is a presidential determination that there are "compelling foreign policy and national security reasons" for it and the transfers do not endanger U.S. readiness.

In addition, the country leasing the equipment must pay all costs in dollars, including reimbursement for depreciation and any losses.

The official noted that Pakistan is strapped for U.S. dollars and that Congress is expected to cut back foreign aid sharply.

There also may be problems with the availability of the equipment, the official said.

"There is a real need. And we'll see what we can do," he said. "Everyone wants to be positive."